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SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION ASPECT OF PEDIATRIC ANTI-RETROVIRAL THERAPY IN UGANDA

Adherence to HAART is partly dependent on open and effective communication with HIV-infected children about their illness and treatment (Bikaako-Kajura et al. (2006). One of the challenges of pediatric ART is that it involves a broad age range of children. This necessitates adapting communication to the developmental needs and understanding of children over time. Difficult family situations of HIV+ children with many having lost one or both parents also pose communication challenges. Previous studies on HIV+ children's diagnosis and treatment have focused mainly on health care providers' and caregivers' dilemmas on whether, when and how to disclose HIV/AIDS diagnosis and treatment to HIV+ children and not on the nature of children's own disclosure practices, challenges and concerns (Bakeera-Kitaka et al. 2010, 2008, Rujumba et al. 2010).

This study will explore HIV positive children's perspectives and communication regarding their illness and treatment and how this may be influencing adherence. The formative phase of the study will be a cross-sectional survey involving caregivers and HIV+ children aimed at describing family situations of HIV+ children and communication patterns within the family. The second phase is designed as an ethnographic study and will use in-depth interviews and participant observation as the main methods of data collection involving HIV+ children aged 8-17 years enrolled on ART in selected Treatment Centres. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of HIV+ children's perspectives and communication regarding their illness and treatment and will provide input to guidelines for health care providers in pediatric ART programmes.